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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND FOREIGN SECRETARY DISCUSS NORTH  
KOREA, MINDANAO, VFA

REF: STATE 66749

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging July 1 breakfast meeting, the Ambassador asked that Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo press ASEAN to enlist Burmese cooperation on North Korean ship inspections, and Secretary Romulo requested a meeting with Secretary Clinton to discuss greater U.S.-ASEAN cooperation at the ARF Ministerial this month in Thailand. The Ambassador was frank in expressing apprehension over the circumstances of tens of thousands of civilians displaced as a result of ongoing combat operations by Philippine government forces against rogue Muslim insurgents in Mindanao. Romulo aired his continued unease at upcoming hearings on the Visiting Forces Agreement in the Philippine Senate, and suggested that clarification of the VFA's language on detention of those convicted would remove a point of concern that activists have used to agitate against the VFA. The two lauded effective cooperation on recent high-profile extradition cases, and the Ambassador raised an American citizen's allegations of abduction and torture at the hands of individuals said to be acting on behalf of Philippine security forces. END SUMMARY.

Burma's Response to UNSCR 1874 -- and ASEAN's Role  
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12. (C) The Ambassador handed over Secretary Clinton's letter thanking Secretary Romulo for hosting the highly successful ASEAN Regional Forum disaster-relief exercise, and offering the Secretary's regrets at being unable to accept the Philippines' invitation to visit the country this summer. Turning to other ASEAN issues, the Ambassador welcomed Burma's pledge to abide by UN Security Council Resolution 1874 and inspect the cargo of the North Korean freighter Kang Nam 1 (reftel). She asked Romulo to encourage the Philippines' ASEAN partners to take a greater role in engaging Burma on this and other issues, emphasizing the importance of urging Burma to include a third party in any inspection of the DPRK vessel's cargo. Romulo concurred, and noting the importance of U.S. accession to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and the Philippines' upcoming role as ASEAN's dialogue partner with the United States, requested a meeting with Secretary Clinton at the upcoming ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial to be held July 21-23 in Phuket, Thailand. The Ambassador welcomed the proposal and said she would pass the request back to Washington with her strong support.

Goals of Possible Washington Visit  
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13. (C) The discussion turned to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's hoped-for July visit to Washington, which Romulo saw as an opportunity to underscore how the Philippines' status as a strong regional partner offered an

opportunity for progress on regional issues such as Burma and North Korea. The Ambassador agreed, adding that the USG would likely also wish to discuss counterterrorism cooperation, violence in Mindanao and its ramifications for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the stalled peace process, plus the larger picture of progress on human rights -- particularly extrajudicial killings -- and efforts to address corruption. Romulo agreed, and expressed his hope that any Washington visit would also afford Arroyo a chance to meet several key USG cabinet secretaries.

#### Concern for Those Displaced by Mindanao Violence

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14. (C) In discussing Mindanao in greater detail, the Ambassador expressed concern that tens of thousands of internally displaced persons will soon mark one year of having left behind their homes and livelihoods due to fighting between Philippine security forces and rogue MILF elements. Foreign Secretary Romulo wondered aloud whether many such refugees were simply availing themselves of the feeding programs and other limited assistance being offered by the Philippine government and international community, and speculated that President Arroyo's opponents were using the IDP issue as political propaganda. The Ambassador strongly disagreed, and observed that, in having visited IDP camps in Mindanao, she could attest that those displaced by the fighting genuinely feared for their own security, but wanted to go home, and that the poor Mindanao communities where the camps were located could ill afford to support such numbers of people for an extended period.

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15. (C) The Ambassador questioned whether it still made sense for the Philippine government to continue prosecuting the fight against rogue MILF elements to the fullest, given the negative consequences for the civilian population, the stalled peace process with the MILF, and the combat capabilities of the Philippine armed forces, which was using up increasingly scarce resources. She urged the Foreign Secretary to intensify efforts to restart the stalled peace process, with an immediate goal of reinstating the ceasefire and dispute-resolution mechanisms which had proven successful in the past. Even if a comprehensive peace agreement might prove elusive during President Arroyo's remaining months in office, a resumption of good-faith peace talks with the MILF could still yield vital progress in restoring people's lives and livelihoods to some semblance of normalcy.

#### Worries Over VFA Hearings in Senate

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16. (C) Secretary Romulo voiced his continuing deep concern over hearings likely to be held in August by the Philippine Senate on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), noting that with campaigning already well underway for the May 2010 presidential election, several prospective candidates in the Senate would likely turn the VFA into a campaign issue and even call for its abrogation. Romulo thanked the Ambassador for the array of information the Embassy had provided on the VFA's benefits, and remarked that he would appreciate continued close cooperation as the hearings approached.

17. (C) The Foreign Secretary recalled how the successful resolution of the long-simmering criminal case against Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith had pointed up the success of the VFA, and he voiced his strong support for its continued application. He noted, however, one key area of the VFA in which greater clarification was needed -- the exact nature and location of the detention facility under Philippine jurisdiction where any convicted U.S. military personnel would be held once all judicial appeals were exhausted and a guilty verdict upheld. The Ambassador took note of this point and replied that the Mission would engage legal counsel of appropriate USG agencies in Washington.

Extraditions, American Citizen's Case  
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18. (C) The Ambassador noted with approval the successful extradition of former police superintendent Cezar Mancao and the likely early extradition of his former PNP colleague Glenn Dumlao, both of whom are linked to a high-profile 2000 double murder case. She offered thanks for the excellent cooperation offered in the U.S. extradition request for Abu Sayyaf Group terrorist Hatta Haipe, and pushed hard for early DFA action in reviewing the request so that the extradition could proceed. Lastly, in discussing U.S.-Philippine law enforcement cooperation in human rights cases, she raised the case of American citizen Melissa Roxas, who alleges that she was abducted and tortured in May by masked persons Roxas believed to be Philippine security personnel. The Ambassador stressed that the Embassy takes seriously the safety and security of Americans, and would welcome any new information that may become available in the case, adding that cases such as Roxas's would likely attract the attention of media and human rights NGOs during President Arroyo's upcoming visit to Washington. Romulo offered to obtain more information on the Roxas case, and added that the Philippines was working hard to ensure respect for essential human rights that all members of a democratic society deserve.

KENNEY